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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [VT](#)
SUBJECT: CATHOLIC-MUSLIM FORUM TO MEET IN NOVEMBER

REF: A. A) VATICAN 17 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)B. B) 2007 VATICAN 180

CLASSIFIED BY: Rafael Foley, Acting DCM.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: The Holy See will host in November the first meeting of the Catholic-Muslim Forum established in response to the dialogue proposal included in the October 13, 2007 "A Common Word" letter from Muslim scholars to the Pope and other Christian leaders. An original signatory of the letter shared with polchief his satisfaction with the progress of the initiative. The meetings of the Catholic-Muslim Forum could lead to greater religious freedom worldwide and to preempt the escalation of frictions between Christians and Muslims when they arise. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Polchief met on June 10 with Imam Sergio Yahe Pallavicini, Vice President of the Italian Islamic Religious Community and an original signatory of "A Common Word", to discuss the meeting between Catholic and Muslim scholars scheduled for November 4 to 6 in Rome. The event, hosted by the Holy See, will bring together 24 scholars from each of the two religions for the first meeting of the recently constituted Catholic-Muslim Forum. On the Muslim side, the scholars will be selected from the signatories of "A Common Word", who now number [1](#)252. (Note: There is no information at this time on who will be present for the Catholic side. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) Pallavicini expressed his satisfaction with the progress of the initiative, which he thought was at its pre-institutionalization stage. In addition to the November meeting, there will be a weeklong conference at Yale University (co-sponsored by Harvard University and the Princeton Theological Seminary) starting on July 24 that will foster a complementary dialogue with Protestant denominations. Pallavicini added that he would be participating at the Yale conference.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Comment: The first gathering of the Catholic-Muslim Forum, which is meeting under the theme of "Love of God, Love of Neighbor", is a positive development in a dialogue that holds the potential to preempt the escalation of frictions between Christians and Muslims when they arise. While the Holy See views the dialogue as an opportunity to obtain greater religious freedom in Muslim countries, the Muslim scholars' letter places a greater emphasis on identifying points of theological agreement -- and thus increase respect for Islam, particularly in the West. These two aspects of the dialogue will be addressed in the first two days of the conference, under the sub-themes of "Theological and Spiritual Foundations" and "Human Dignity and Mutual Respect".

[1](#)5. (C) Comment continued: From the Holy See's perspective, a challenge of the dialogue lies in the limited ability of the Muslim scholars to influence governments and public opinion in Muslim countries. As/if the "A Common Word" dialogue gains prominence, the Holy See hopes that governments in specific Muslim countries may feel more comfortable expanding religious freedom. The dialogue is already influencing leaders who are

currently skeptical about the initiative -- such as the Saudi King (reftel b) -- but who do not wish to be left out of inter-religious dialogues and are proposing their own initiatives to the Vatican. End comment.

GLENDON